

SCHILLER'S FIRST LOVE.

Translated from Die Gart mahnung. On a summer evening of the year 1781 there was assembled at Mannheim, in one of the stately houses on the Paradeplatz, a select company, who listened with rapt attention to a young man declaiming a few scenes from his latest drama, Louise Miller. The youthful poet, with the slightly inclined head, thoughtful brow, and lustrous eyes, revealing a depth of thought and feeling, is Friedrich Schiller. Near him we perceive the gentleman of the houses, that man with the finely cut, intellectual features, is Schiller's faithful friend and the publisher of his earliest writings, the bookseller and court councillor, Christian Friedrich Schwann, himself a meritorious author and highly esteemed by Lessing and Wieland, by Herder and Goethe. And of the two females, just developed into wonderful beauty, hanging upon the poet's words, one is Schwan's eldest daughter, Anna Margaret, whose relations to Schiller have thrown a ray of poetry upon her name, the other is Margaret's bosom friend, the fascinating and talented actress, Miss Ziegler, who wrought such deep impressions on every auditor by her impersonation of "Louise" in "Love and Intrigue" and "Lovers in 'Fiesco'" and of whom a contemporary writes:—"Never again have I heard accents or melody of love as came from her lips when enacting Fiesco's consort." Yonder fine figure of a somewhat aristocratic bearing, but with a mild and pleasing expression of countenance, is the founder and director of the celebrated Mannheim Theatre, Baron Wolfgang Heribert von Dalberg; at his side we notice one of the greatest of historians, August Wilhelm Hiftland, renowned also as a dramatic writer.

Our readers are acquainted with that tragical crisis in Schiller's life which removed the former army physician from Stuttgart, and bore him to the friendly city on the banks of the Neckar. In April, 1781, "The Robbers" had been put into the printer's hands. To secure for the work a wider circulation Schiller, before the printing was completed, wrote to Schwan, transmitting to him at the same time the first seven finished sheets. Full of enthusiasm, as he himself expresses it in a letter to Schiller, Schwan instantly hastened to find Dalberg, and read the fragment aloud to him. Dalberg now requested the poet to adapt his piece for the Mannheim stage, and it was thus, with various alterations, against which Schiller vainly protested, performed at Mannheim on the 13th of January, 1782, he being present. At the second performance (May 25) he had again travelled to Mannheim without leave, was arrested, and incurred the displeasure of his sovereign. But the more onerous his condition grew, the more his spirit of liberty was aroused. While the general interest was engaged by the festivities preparing at Solitude (the king's pleasure-palace), in honor of the Grand Prince Paul of Russia, Schiller had escaped unobserved with his trusty friend, Streicher.

We do not propose to describe Schiller's third sojourn at Mannheim and Oggersheim, the destination with which he had to contend there, and the crushing disappointments he experienced from Dalberg. Among the few who during that time stood steadfast by the unfortunate poet was Schwan. Though Dalberg had rejected Fiesco as unavailable, Schwan, justly admiring the tragedy, undertook its publication; the sum given for it sufficed to cover Schiller's boarding expenses, and to defray the costs of the journey to Bauerbach, near Miningen, where a noble lady, the Baroness von Wolzogen, tendered to the poet the quiet of a secluded retreat.

There is little to aid us in discovering what were Schiller's relations to the Schwan family during this period. But we may draw an inference from one of Schiller's letters to Schwan, dated Bauerbach, December 8, 1782, in which he says:—"My recent haste and clandestine departure prevented me from bidding adieu to my dear friend, I do so now, and offer you my sincerest thanks for the tender interest you have taken in my fate. The situation in which I then was afforded me abundant opportunity to test the fidelity of my friends, and unpleasant as were many of my experiences, yet I have been sufficiently recompensed by the unflinching firmness with which some few friends abide that test." We are further enlightened by a letter which Schiller's father on the same day addressed to Schwan from Solitude, wherein this sentence occurs:—"Your Honor has shown my son, Dr. Schiller, such extraordinary friendship that I consider it my bounden duty to offer you my most cordial thanks, with the most ardent wish and the humblest request that it may please you to continue your valued favor to that young man."

But Schiller was fated not to be absorbed too long by poetical plans at Bauerbach, on his "literary Wartburg." "It was a siren's voice," writes Streicher, "that called him back to Mannheim, the coaxing, seductive voice of Dalberg; and so, after a residence of seven months, he parted from his benefactors." On the 25th of July, 1783, we again meet with him at Mannheim, where he took lodgings in a pleasant dwelling situated near the palace buildings. After Dalberg's house he loved most to be at Schwan's. "The ladies here," he writes on the 13th of November to the Baroness von Wolzogen, "are not particularly noticeable, Miss Schwan being about the only one, an actress excepted (she refers to Caroline Ziegler, whose untimely death evoked general regret), who is an excellent person. These and some others sometimes cause me a pleasant hour; for I freely admit that to associate with the fair sex is by no means distasteful to me." Like a heavenly vision the youthful, amiable, and intellectual Margaret Schwan crossed the impressive poet's path and quickly supplanted the affection which had just begun to bud in his breast for Charlotte von Wolzogen.

Margaret Schwan, we are informed by Madame von Wolzogen, was then in her seventeenth year, a very beautiful girl, with large expressive eyes, very quick-witted, and with a mind drawing her more to the world, literature, and art, than to a quiet domestic life. In her father's hospitable mansion, the cynosure of *salons* and *bel-espri*, she had early acquired not only a superior education, but also learned the art of asserting this advantage. Her features, judging from a painting still preserved by the Goetz family at Mannheim, are not without a touch of pride and of severity. Margaret was generally present when Schiller read to her father his latest poetical compositions, nor was it long before her heart took part in these delights, and already the public voice designated her as Schiller's betrothed. Still, no decisive step was taken, not even when Schiller's connection with the Mannheim stage began to loosen more and more, and he was already preparing to accept an invitation from Koerner to come to Leipsic.

It was on a cheerless March evening when, with a heavy heart, the poet extended his hand in farewell to Margaret, who stood before him in all her loveliness, repressing her

deep emotion, and did not suffer him to depart without a friendly remembrance. At dawn of the following day Schiller waved his last adieu to the city on the Neckar. He never saw Mannheim again.

"Who, bit-ter-some melody, Thee greet through, Ah! how very easily Human beings bid adieu!" The 17th of April, 1785, saw Schiller in Leipsic, and the week succeeding his arrival he wrote to Schwan, asking his daughter's hand in marriage. After describing his journey to Leipsic and his acquaintance there, he thus proceeds:—"It is my intention to be very diligent here, to work at 'Carlo's' and the 'Thalia,' and what will probably please you most, to return by degrees to my medical studies. I long impatiently for this epoch of my life, when my prospects shall be better established and more definite, and when I shall be able to follow my favorite inclination only for amusement. Did I not formerly study medicine *am amore*, why should I not do so the more now? This, my dear friend, might possibly convince you as to the fixedness of my purpose; but what will give you the most complete guaranty, what most banish every doubt regarding my firmness, I have kept from you until this moment. Now or never must it be said. It is only my distance from you that inspires me with courage to avow this wish of my heart. Often enough while the happiness was yet mine of being near you, often enough did the confession start to my lips; but again and again did my courage fail me when on the point of telling you all frankly. Your kindness, your sympathy, your excellent heart, have caused me to cherish within my breast a hope which can be justified only by your indulgence and friendship. The free access I had to your house afforded me an opportunity to become thoroughly acquainted with your amiable daughter, and the generous and kind treatment of which you both deemed me worthy has seduced my heart into the bold wish to be accepted as your son. Hitherto my prospects were vague and dark, now they are beginning to change for the better. Every fresh intellectual effort will bring me nearer the certain goal. Judge for yourself whether I shall attain it when my ardor is quickened by the gratification of my dearest wish. Two years more and my fate will be decided. I feel how much I ask, and how boldly and with what little right I ask it. It is already a year since this thought has been occupying my soul; but my esteem for you and your excellent daughter was too great to permit me to give free play to a wish which then could be seconded by nothing. I imposed upon myself the duty of visiting your house less often, of seeking distraction in distance; but my heart would not be quieted by the shabby deception. To the Duke of Weimar I first unbosomed myself. Induced by his obliging kindness and the declaration that he took an interest in the happiness of others, I confessed to him that my felicity depended upon a union with your noble daughter, and I am sure he will do his part when the question is to complete my happiness by this alliance. I shall add nothing more than the assurance that a hundred others, perhaps, might offer your daughter a more brilliant lot than I can at present promise her, but I deny that a heart can be fondly beating for her with a warmer love. Upon your decision, to which I look forward with impatience and anxious expectation, it will depend whether I may venture to address your daughter herself."

What was the issue of this suit? The poet's biographers pretty nearly concur in remarking that "Schwan, without even making Schiller's proposal known to his daughter, offered the bitterness of his refusal by saying that Margaret's disposition was not in harmony with Schiller's." We have it in our power to correct this statement. What Caroline von Wolzogen says in her "Life of Schiller" (I. 206), namely, "that Schwan openly expressed to the poet, whom he held in great esteem, his doubts as to whether his daughter's peculiar nature fitted her to be his companion, and that in so doing Schwan acted only as a friend," may, indeed, be true; but at the bottom the matter was otherwise. On the margin of said autograph letter of Schiller's, still in possession of the Goetz family at Mannheim, we find the following remark in Schwan's own hand:—"The 'Laura' in Schiller's 'Resignation' is no one else but my eldest daughter; I gave her this letter to read, and told Schiller to address himself directly to her. Why nothing ever grew out of the matter has remained a mystery to me."

Let us attempt to solve this mystery. There are three things which must be kept in view. First, we originally notice in Schiller (as in many other men of genius) a certain aversion to marriage, a reluctance to give up a higher life of mind and feeling for a finite passion. On being advised by the composer Zumsteeg, who had just been married, to follow his example, Schiller replied, "No, let me bear my lot alone, in spite of the hot blood coursing through my veins. You know that on this subject I philosophize after my own fashion."

But in the second place, this high-soaring, silent idealism came ever in contact with sober reality, so hostile to the ideal. Bachelor life, without order, without female care, disgusted Schiller. "Alone without guidance," he complains in a letter to Reinwald, "I struggle to manage my domestic concerns; a thousand petty troubles, cares, and projects, hovering incessantly before me, distract my thoughts, dissipate all poetic dreams, and clog the wings of enthusiasm." From this state of mind springs a longing for the pleasures of a comfortable home, for which even poetry, if necessary, is often given in exchange. "Hence we can understand those words of Schiller written to his female friend at Bauerbach (May 30, 1783):—"There was a time when the hope of immortal fame tickled me, just as a fine dress pleases a woman. Now it is all the same to me; I shall send you my poetic laurels for your next *bonnet à la mode*, and let you have my tragic muse for a kitchen-maid. How very small is the poet's highest greatness compared with the thought of a happy life!"

Thirdly and lastly, it may be asserted that Schiller, whose youth was passed amid the Storm and Stress period, who was himself so dissatisfied with the female characters of his early dramas, did not yet know how to appreciate sufficiently the graces and worth of woman. "Maiden's hearts" he at that time sang:—"Maiden's hearts small caskets are, Poor to be taken, Many lures the golden star, Though but of ornament. If of hundred, ninety-nine Bawbles of no worth containe."

"It is strange," he writes to Koerner, "but I love strongly sensitive natures, and every coquette can fascinate me. Every one has certain power over me, and though, owing to my vanity and sensibility, none can inflame my heart, yet they make me feel uneasy enough." In another letter to the same friend:—"My heart is altogether free," he

says: "I have faithfully observed what I made my rule and what I solemnly promised; you to weaken my feelings by allowing them to put this theory of 'diffusion' into practice. At Mannheim, Margaret Schwan is the real, undisputed queen of his heart; at the same time he begins an intimacy with Charlotte von Kalb, the beautiful and accomplished Titanide, with the large eyes and heart, attracting the poet towards her with all the fiery ardor of her tormented soul; in the spring of the same year he goes to Frankfurt with Hftland to witness the representation of 'Fiesco,' and loses his heart to the esteemed actress Sophia Albrecht. And on January 18 of the next year, while a charming actress escorts the gifted and handsome, and presses his miniature into her hands. But what, perhaps, must appear even more strange is, that not one of these numerous intimacies produced a lyric bud, such as burst with such richness and fragrance from Goethe's heart; not one of them awakened as much as a song in the poet's breast!

We sum up our remarks by saying that it was not a deep necessity of the heart which determined Schiller to ask for Margaret's hand, but rather the longing for an existence free from care. On the arrival of Schwan's answer Schiller's highest wish had already been gratified. Koerner's friendship afforded him freedom from want and the pressure of circumstances which had so early muffled the fire of the youthful poet's soul. Of returning to medicine (which in no event was so seriously intended) he would think no longer now, but at the same time the beautiful dream of a union with Margaret dissolved before his eyes. In the rural seclusion of the village of Gohlis he sought to overcome the grief with which these disappointed hopes filled him.

The gloomy reflections of those days gave rise to that much admired poem "Resignation," in which the poet forcibly carries out the idea that the hope of a reward in another world is but a fond delusion, as hope, equally with enjoyment, contains its own reward. Schiller himself studiously avoided ever alluding to the occasion of the poem, which, moreover, he desired should not be regarded as his own confession of faith, but merely as an outburst of passion; whereas if Schwan, his intimate friend, declares emphatically that it alludes to his relations with his daughter Margaret, we have the less reason to question this assertion as nothing is opposed to such a supposition, neither the time at which the touching verses were written, nor the passionate excitement of those days, in which Schiller grew more and more dissatisfied with the theatre, with Dalberg, and with the actors; in which Madame von Kalb's passion disgusted instead of cheering him, whilst his pecuniary embarrassment became daily more troublesome, and the homage which Margaret's beauty and accomplishments received from every side filled him with all the pangs of jealousy.

Nevertheless, Schiller always held the Schwan family in affectionate remembrance. When Schwan was on his way to Leipsic with his two daughters the following year, Schiller met them at Meissen, and accompanied them to their destination, as also to Dresden, evincing the most cordial friendship. As late as the 2d of May, 1788, he writes to Schwan:—"Believe me that your memory will ever be indelibly impressed upon my mind and has no need of being revived by the common method of persons in intercourse and letters of assurance. At Wieland's they often speak of your eldest daughter; during her stay of a few days there she won the affection and esteem of all the family. So still continue to be a trifle remembered by her? Really, it makes me blush to think how little I deserve this for my long silence." To Margaret herself Schiller never wrote. The poet's silence, for whom she preserved a warm affection, weighed heavily upon her soul. Once more she met him at Heidelberg while on his journey to Suabia with his young wife—a meeting by which both were most deeply affected; and Charlotte von Lengfeld found her former rival very amiable. Thus far extend my sources regarding Schiller's relations to Margaret Schwan.

All of Schiller's biographers agree in stating that Margaret died at the age of thirty-nine, in childbirth. This statement also is incorrect. Margaret was never married. On the twenty-seventh of January, 1795, she was laid by her mother's side in the grave, aged not more than twenty-nine years.

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